



Johnny Miller: How to analyze a swing sequence

The trick is knowing what to look for. Here is a frame-by-frame guide

By [Johnny Miller](#)

With Guy Yocom

Photos By Dom Furore

To the average golfer, a great golf swing is like a magician's trick. The everyday hacker isn't exactly sure how the expert does it, but he suspects that if he sees the act repeated enough times, he'll discern how the pro hits the ball so far and straight, how he pulls the rabbit out of the hat.

Of course, most magicians wouldn't appreciate being photographed with high-speed cameras from three different angles. That would blow their cover. On the other hand, the golfers presented here don't mind being photographed at all, because they know there are no secrets to hitting a golf ball. There is only the art and science of coordinating their physical movements so they control the ball's flight.

As you progress through these sequences, it helps to know what is good and bad in a golf swing, the difference between cause and effect, and when it's safe to adapt certain movements into your own swing.

Many parts of the swing are superfluous, while a spare few are critically important. As you observe the different methods, pay special attention to the face-on view. When you picture your swing, that's probably the position you see in your mind's eye. The face-on view is best for showing how far the player has turned on the backswing, and the relationship between the left arm and the shaft on the downswing. It also reveals

the critical six inches or so through impact and whether the club-shaft has returned to the 90-degree position it was in at address.

The down-the-line view, with the target visible in the distance (though often out of focus), is best for showing the position of the right elbow during the swing, how the hips are working, whether the club is laid off or across the target line at the top of the backswing and whether the butt end of the club is pointed at the ball midway through the downswing.

The up-the-line view, taken from along the target line looking back toward the golfer, is the weak sister of the three. It's good for seeing what went on after impact, but not a whole lot else. And it's definitely hazardous to the health of the photographer.

Golf swings are an eternal puzzle, and as a detective you are free to search for your own clues. Your biggest advantage is knowing that every picture tells a story, and that the camera doesn't lie.



At address

1. If the head is positioned well to the player's right, weight stays to the right on forward swing, promoting a high trajectory.
2. The inside of the feet line up with the outside of the shoulders. If wider, player slides through impact. If narrower, he's a turner.
3. Standard ball position is under the left shoulder. If it's back of that, player hits a draw, if forward a fade.

First move back

4. A wide arc early in backswing makes for a difficult transition move at the top of backswing.
5. If the clubhead is outside the hands, player turns body instead of swinging arms.
6. If the legs appear "quiet," player creates lots of torque early. The left knee moving out means a longish backswing.



At the top

1. If the right arm is close to the side, the left arm will bend at the elbow. If the left arm is straight, it's a sure bet the right arm flew away from side.
2. If the clubface is open, player must square it by rotating hands. If it is closed, player must "block" through impact to prevent hook.
3. Right elbow close to side is the sign of a big body turn.
4. Left heel up indicates a big turn; power will come from speed. Left heel down is a move for supple players who create power through leverage.



First move down

1. If the club covers the right arm, player will draw or push the ball. If it covers the left arm, he's come over the top and will pull or fade.
2. If the left leg is straight, player is spinning the shoulders to the left -- not necessarily a bad move.
3. Angle shouldn't be more than 90 degrees.
4. Most players will show a slight lift in the right heel, proof they've shifted their weight to left side.



Impact

1. My generation liked to see the head kept to the right. The trend today on tour is to move it left.
2. Angle between the right forearm and wrist shows player has turned clubhead into a battering ram.
3. If the back of the left wrist is cupped here, it better have been cupped at address.
4. If the clubshaft is at 90 degrees, it's a promise of physics that player has hit a good shot.
5. Big shoulder tilt shows player tried to maintain a square clubface.
6. Shoulders open here means less stress on back.



Finish

1. If the hands are high here, they probably were high at the top of the backswing, too.
2. If the shaft is horizontal, player is a fader. If it's vertical, he probably hit a draw.
3. If you see a reverse C from the face-on view, you're looking at an old-timer. Younger players stand erect at finish.
4. Left elbow behind the head is a sign of fierce acceleration through impact.

Whose swing should you copy?

As you pore over these great swings, at some point you're going to stop at a certain player and say, "I wish I could swing like that." But before you give yourself the green light to copy every detail of the player's method, ask yourself the following:

Is the player built like me? If your idol is tall and you are short, be careful. Tall players tend to swing on a more upright plane, and if you are of short or average height, trying to adopt that plane can be a nightmare. Altering your swing plane is one of the hardest changes to make, and changing to a plane that is at odds with your height will not make you a better player in the long run.

Is the player stronger and more flexible than I am? If your idol makes a huge shoulder turn and swings the club past parallel, the mechanics of his downswing are predicated on that huge turn. If you physically are unable to swing the club back as far as he or she does, it's futile trying to copy the downswing.

Do you have the same type of grip? I'm not talking about overlapping, interlocking or the 10-finger. What's important is that your grip be similarly weak or strong. If you have a strong grip and try to copy the mechanics of a player with a weak grip, the results can be disastrous. Players with weak grips, for example, tend to rotate their hands aggressively through impact. If you have a strong grip and try to rotate your hands, you'll be looking for your ball in the fairway to the left of the one you're playing.